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14. ABSTRACT
The American public has a right to know how its nation's treasures are expended. The reinvigoration of the embedded media program during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) was implemented to accomplish just this mission. Embedded media participated in unprecedented numbers during OIF. Some 692 embedded media had the unique experience to live, work, sleep, and even die among the U.S. forces operating in Iraq. Some had preconceived agendas about how they were going to exploit the terrible horrors they were about to encounter in an effort to degrade the military leadership, dissuade the civilian leadership, or perhaps dismantle the public will as was arguably successful during Vietnam. The majority, however, volunteered to recount the actual events as they happened and bring them home to living rooms across the globe. Their intention was to display the facts in real time as they happened and allow the public to decide upon the veracity. The presence of media on the battlefield, however, poses unique challenges to both the tactical commander as well as the operational commander. The intent of this paper is to compare and contrast the embedded media's impact on the tactical and operational commander.

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Embedded Media – A Force Multiplier or Force Divider

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of
the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

Student Signature: _____

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* All figures were taken from same source. Source: Richard K. Wright, Assessment of the DoD Embedded Media Program (Alexandria: Institute for Defense Analysis, 2004)

Abstract

The American public has a right to know how its nation's treasures are expended. The reinvigoration of the embedded media program during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) was implemented to accomplish just this mission. Embedded media participated in unprecedented numbers during OIF. Some 692 embedded media had the unique experience to live, work, sleep, and even die among the U.S. forces operating in Iraq. Some had preconceived agendas about how they were going to exploit the terrible horrors they were about to encounter in an effort to degrade the military leadership, dissuade the civilian leadership, or perhaps dismantle the public will as was arguably successful during Vietnam. The majority, however, volunteered to recount the actual events as they happened and bring them home to living rooms across the globe. Their intention was to display the facts in real time as they happened and allow the public to decide upon the veracity. The presence of media on the battlefield, however, poses unique challenges to both the tactical commander as well as the operational commander. The intent of this paper is to compare and contrast the embedded media's impact on the tactical and operational commander.

Introduction

"Geraldo Rivera Kicked Out of Iraq"; "U. S. Military Death Toll Exceeds 2,000";

"Embedded Media Reporter, Bob Woodruff and His Cameraman, John Voigt Are

Severely Injured by an Incendiary Explosive Device"; "Saving Private (Jessica)

Lynch"; "We Got Him- - U.S. Forces Capture Sadaam Hussein"; and the headlines

continue as the media successfully feeds our addiction to spectacular news, whether it

is in print, television, the radio, or on the world wide web. That is why after a long

day at work, John and Mary Q. Public sit down in the evening to get another dose of

spectacular news. Americans want to know who, what, when, where, and why, and

then of course, who is to blame and what could have or should have been done to

prevent the event from happening. This is the reality of how the headlines continue to

help shape public opinion with respect to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) and

the Global War on Terrorism, or as the latest title is now called, "the Long War."

Whatever the label for the conflict and whatever the headlines display, Americans

and their coalition partners are involved in a deadly conflict and the media will

continue to influence public opinion.

Military success or failure depends upon the support of the nation and as the

conflict protracts, public will is more often influenced by spectacular news.

Throughout this paper, numerous examples will be examined supporting the fact that

public will is heavily influenced by the media.   Looking back at the Vietnam

conflict, some would argue it was the media that ultimately changed the public's

attitude with respect to the course of the war.

The media contradicted the more positive view of the war officials sought to project, and for better or worse it was the journalists' view that prevailed with the public, whose disenchantment forced an end to American involvement [in Vietnam]. Often this view is coupled with its corollary, that television has decisively changed the political dynamics of war so that no "televised war" can long retain political support. These views are shared not only in the United States but abroad as well.[1]

The research question the author intends to answer is: How does the embedded media's presence during OIF impact the tactical commander as well as the operational commander? In order to answer this question, some operative terms need to be defined. The term "embedded reporter" (commonly referred to as "embeds"), refers to the American reporters who were assigned to U. S. military units. "Unilaterals" refer to those in the media business who find their way to the battlefield not sponsored by military units. OASD-PA is the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense Public Affairs who choreographed the implementation of the embedded media program to include "media boot camp."

The American public has a right to know how its treasures are expended in battle. Since today's media has near "real time" capability to transmit uncensored events as they occur across the globe, then it is imperative to integrate the media's participation into the planning effort to accurately inform the public. To neglect or delay the integration of the media into the planning process can ultimately yield additional stories that produce a skeptical public.

This paper will provide a brief discussion regarding the history of embedded reporting from Vietnam to the Global War on Terror, now referred to as "the Long War." This will be followed by an in-depth examination of the embedded media's effect on the tactical commander, the impact on the operational commander, and how

American public opinion has been influenced during OIF. Although international as well as enemy public opinion is heavily influenced by embedded media, those topics are beyond the scope of this paper. Last, this paper will offer recommendations for improved military-media relations without compromising the integrity of either.

History of Embedded Reporting

During the Vietnam War, media reporters had unfettered access to the battlefield, very few restrictions, frequent use of military transportation, and unlimited contact with the troops. Since there was minimal censorship, horrific images of the war appeared on televisions in living rooms throughout the United States in the never ending pursuit of spectacular news. Consequently, there has been a strained relationship between the military and the media ever since. In an opinion poll in 1995, 64 percent of the military officers surveyed believed the media's coverage of Vietnam harmed the war effort.[2]

With this strained relationship, it is not surprising that the media was not granted unfettered access during Operation URGENT FURY in Grenada in 1983. In this instance, lack of access owed as much to the operational level actions of time, space and force as they did to policy. The island was physically too small, the operation occurred too quickly, and media safety was of concern given the limited forces used. The media protested which led to the Sidle Commission in which Major General Winant "Si" Sidle, former Army Chief of Information, chaired the military-media relations panel, yielding the eventual creation of media pools. These pools were

groups of media that were herded around by Public Affairs Officers (PAO) who would lead the formation to sanitized areas of the battlefield. These pools proved ineffective during Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama in 1989. The reason cited was delays and ineffective planning resulting in media pools arriving after the majority of combat actions were complete.[3] This perceived failure to cooperate put additional strain on the military-media relationship.

The military's subsequent attempt at embedding media occurred during Operation DESERT SHIELD/STORM (1990-1991) during which more than 1600 media wanted to cover the operation. The military, however, agreed to only 125 at a time, which led to a rotational plan. A military escort accompanied each small pool of reporters and again two to three day delays were encountered in getting the stories filed since couriers had to bring the stories from the units to the rear.[4] Censorship fears and untimely reporting did not improve the already strained military-media relationship. The next generation of embeds, however, were introduced to the frontlines of battle and this access provided the basis for improvement.

In Bosnia in1995 a relatively successful program flourished with embed units in Germany who lived with military units between two and six weeks. The net result proved positive for the media as well as for troop morale.[5] Kosovo provided limited reporting opportunities since it was predominantly an air operation.[6] Similarly, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) in Afghanistan (2001 to present) was initially comprised of mostly special operations forces, which yielded limited opportunities for embeds until the conventional forces massed in 2002. Although still

limited in scope, again the embed program produced positive results.[7]   The

previous conflicts have been briefly described in order to demonstrate the maturation

of the embedded media program within the Department of Defense (DoD).   OIF was

not an island invasion, a mountainous conflict fought primarily with special operation

forces, or even a predominant air operation. Realizing this, Bryan Whitman, the

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Media Operations (OASD-PA), and the

mastermind behind the embedded media program for OIF, was able to orchestrate

arguably one of the most brilliant forms of information operations (IO) support to

date. OIF provided the perfect stage to embed a large number of media considering

that air, land, and ground forces in excess of 150,000 troops were used. For planning

purposes, this provided plenty of locations to widely disseminate numerous embeds.

Figures 1 and 2 provide the ground and air unit initial embed planning figures.

Adding to the brilliant initial success of its operational plans, the U.S. military was familiar with the terrain, having been there during Operation DESERT SHIELD/STORM, and had success on a smaller scale with embeds during that conflict. Additionally, the same geographic locations provided an opportunity to integrate previous lessons learned.

Table IV-1. Ground-Unit Initial Embed Planning Figures

Component	Unit	No. of Embeds	Subtotal
Army	CFLCC	33	465
	VCORPS	50	
	3ID	85	
	101ABN	61	
	82ABN	16	
	4ID	65	
	1CAV	72	
	2ACR	9	
	3ACR	12	
	1AD	62	
Marine Corps	IMEF	206	206
Total			671

Figure 1 found on pg IV-12 of Wright's IDA report.

Table IV-2. Air Force Initial Embed Plan

Country	Air Base	Embeds
Kuwait	Al Jaber AB (AJ)	10
	Ali Al Salem AB (AAS)	5
Saudi Arabia	Prince Sultan AB (PSAB)	15
Turkey	Incirlik AB (INC)	15
Qatar	Al Udeid AB (AU)	30
	Doha Int'l Airport (Commando Solo) (CS)	3
Bahrain	Shaikh Isa AB (SI)	5
Total		83

Figure 2 found on pg IV-13 of Wright's IDA report.

More importantly, the value of including a large number of embedded media would be, as Whitman recounts:

> We also knew, though, that our potential adversary at that time was a practiced liar, a person who used denial and deception and disinformation on a regular basis. And we knew we would want to try to counter and mitigate some of the effects of that constant flow of disinformation. And what better way to do that than with trained observers, kind of the definition of a reporter, out there in the field, able to report in near real time everything that was occurring as opposed to giving any credibility or credence to what the Iraqi Defense Ministry might be putting out.[8]

In February 2003 the OASD-PA released a message providing guidance, policies, and procedures on embedding media in the CENTCOM area of responsibility, which turned into OIF. To the DoD's credit, OASD-PA had enough foresight to realize media coverage would influence public perception and wanted the factual story - good, bad and the ugly - relayed to the public before others adversely influenced the media with disinformation and distortions.[9]

Considering this brief history of the embed program, what impact does it actually have on the tactical commander, operational commander and the American public?

Before the discussion of embedded media progresses, however, it is important to expound upon the two categories of media reporters currently present on the battlefield, embedded media and unilaterals. Embedded media live with a military unit, only after many have participated in the week long media boot camp offered by he Services (See Figure 3). During this training, the embeds learn the fundamentals of the armed services as well as basic survival skills, to include donning nuclear, biological, and chemical warfare suits and gas masks.

Table V-14. Media Training Course Dates and Locations

Service	Dates	Location
Navy/Marine Corps	16–22 November 2002	Norfolk Naval Station and Quantico Marine Corps Base (MCB), Virginia
Army	16–20 December 2002	Ft. Benning, Georgia
Air Force	20–24 January 2003	Ft. Dix, New Jersey
Marine Corps	3–7 February 2003	Quantico MCB, Virginia

Figure 3 found on pg V-39 of Wright's IDA report.

The unilaterals, on the other hand, are those media participants who show up on the battlefield without a military sponsor in order to get "the real story." Some would pay the ultimate price while acting unilaterally.

Embedded Media's Impact on the Tactical Commander

Troops devoting time to protect or care for media representatives are also troops not protecting or caring for fellow soldiers. Detroit News Reporter John Bebow relays the story about the French television reporters' vehicle that got a flat and a

U. S. Civil Affairs Officer, who should have been supervising the distillation of fresh water for people in Saddam City, instead served as the "AAA road crew" for these same hapless French reporters.[10]

Similarly, Washington Times Chief Photographer Joe Eddins, who was embedded with the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) Forward Services Support Group (FSSG), recalls an incident in which he was invited to visit the Sixth Engineer Service Battalion (ESB) that was setting up water purifiers in the Saddam Hussein Canal. The canal was about seventy-five meters wide. On the south side, the land was five meters high and secure, the north side was twenty meters high and not secure. The officer in charge sent four Marines across the canal in full uniform, including Kevlar flak vest and weapons, to set up a security perimeter. Unfortunately, two of the Marines drowned trying to cross the river.

Because the photographer arrived ten to fifteen minutes after the event happened, there were Marines still in the water looking for their fellow Marines while the photographer was taking pictures and asking questions. The on-scene USMC commander had to deal with a volatile situation - he had exposed troops, an unsecured northern position, two drowned Marines, and a photographer taking pictures and asking questions because he had to "document this for history." The existing OASD-PA guidance required media to adhere to the seventy-two-hour grace period for injured or killed service members in order to notify next of kin. When the photographer returned to base camp, he relayed the story immediately to his newspaper and told them he had pictures. The newspaper's Pentagon reporter, Bill Gertz, made phone calls, which started the reaction chain. Shortly thereafter, multiple

Pentagon generals were calling the unit to find out why a <u>Washington Times</u> reporter was asking all these questions regarding the drowned Marines.[11]

   Another example concerns the Marine who stepped on a "toe-popper" - a small mine - and damaged his foot. The media took a picture and transmitted it back home. Unfortunately, the family saw the photo of their son on a stretcher before they were officially notified.[12]

   Multiply similar events by the presence of greater than 600 embedded media during OIF, broadcasting their stories into living rooms across America, and it is easy to understand how the media has such a powerful influence on public opinion and on perceived progress in Iraq. The challenge is exacerbated when a reporter goes into the embedded media program with a predetermined agenda to expose only the negative issues as they arise.

   Personnel on the battlefield who do not wield a weapon are not an asset but a liability. When a vehicle seat is occupied by embedded media, that seat can not be used by a trained military member who can provide additional firepower to the battle. Although the OASD-PA guidance prohibits embeds from carrying personal firearms, their presence still requires the tactical commander to take considerable measures to maximize the embedded media's safety. Some commanders assigned two security escorts for each embed, thereby reducing the unit's combat capability. It is not possible, however, to protect everyone at all times. The embedded media suffered a fraction of the losses compared to the unilaterals. Figure 4 contains the list of embedded media who were killed between 20 March 2003 and 1 May 2003, the end of major combat operations.

Table VI-1. Embeds Who Died During OIF

Date	Name	Media Type	Media Organization	Embedded Unit
4 April	Michael Kelly	UM	*Atlantic Monthly*	3rd Infantry Division
6 April	David Bloom	UT	NBC	3rd Infantry Division
7 April	Christian Leibig	IM	*Focus* (Germany)	3rd Infantry Division
7 April	Julio Parrado	IN	*El Mundo* (Spain)	3rd Infantry Division

Figure 4 found on pg VI-24 of Wright's IDA

Since the embedded media lived among the troops in the field, provisions had to be made for additional rations, berthing, as well as medical requirements. Although there was a logistical impact on the tactical commander, there was also the psychological impact firmly implanted in the back of tactical commander's mind with regard to the question of, "how will this look on TV?" which certainly may have impacted his decision-making process. Just as "locker room talk" exists that is not discussed in mixed company, there is also an obvious shift in decorum when media are present, that impacts, however slight, a unit's cohesion.

Operational security is always of great concern during combat operations. The embedded media were provided with written guidance describing what they could and could not report upon. Some embeds chose to ignore the rules and subsequently were disembedded. Although, there were relatively few infractions, they did span across each of the services:

> Three embeds from three different media organizations were involuntarily disembedded and not allowed to return to a unit. The first embed, with an Air Force unit, was disembedded from an air base for taking pictures in a scheduling area that included pilot names after being told previously not to do so. In addition, the embed went into a secure area and wrote an inappropriate message on a missile. The second embed, with an Army unit, was disembedded for failing to comply with a directive to all embeds to cease using the Thuraya satellite phone, if they had one, because of security concerns about being able to target U.S. unit locations through the phone's built-in Global Positioning ystem (GPS) coordinate feature. The embed was warned twice about using the phone and was disembedded after using it a third time. The third embed, with a Marine unit, was disembedded for writing about future operations related to troop

movements. This embed attempted to appeal to OASD(PA) but was disembedded before he completed the appeal process.[13]

In August of 2003 the Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) PAO stated about twenty-six reporters were disembedded for various reasons.[14] Clearly, such an imposition upon tactical units can lead one to conclude that embeds may serve as force dividers at the tactical level.

Impact on the Operational Commander

Fortunately, not all the news is negative regarding the embedded media. Although their presence provides more of a logistics challenge for the tactical commander, which can be overcome with additional planning, the embeds can be seen as a force multiplier for the operational commander. This becomes obvious considering the increases in public support, elevated troop morale, and timely contributions in support of information operations (IO).

Public Support

Some would argue that the only way the United States could possibly lose the war in Iraq is if the balance of the Clauswitzian trinity of the people, the government, and the army were disrupted. As the only superpower, America's military superiority is unchallenged. Likewise, with a coalition of the willing of greater than forty countries and an opponent who violated United Nations Resolution 1441, the United States government was determined to prosecute the war. The weakest link in this trinity was viewed as the people or, specifically, the will of the American public. Realizing this,

OASD-PA developed an ingenious plan through embedding media to strengthen the resolve of the American public.

Before OIF commenced, some media were initially concerned that an embed would lose his objectivity and would only have a "soda straw view" of the war.[15] While the embed cohabitates with a unit, that embed is subjected to a narrow focus of only that unit's day-to-day events. Therefore, the report filed tends to be smaller in scope, but much more detailed and accurate as well. Additionally, a bond is formed between the war fighters and the embeds. The resultant reports transmitted back to the parent news company is a "soda straw" view of the events occurring within that unit, which more often than not, favors the unit.

This was exactly what the OASD-PA sought--an objective, accurate, detailed report of a unit's contribution to the war effort. This is not to say that the embeds did not report the "bad" and the "ugly" events that occurred as previously discussed. The majority of the reports filed by embeds, however, were of better quality than those filed by unilaterals. To get an accurate depiction of the war, it was the job of the editors and producers to put a majority of the "soda straws" together providing the "big picture" for the public. Therefore, when the majority of the "soda straws" are "feel good stories," and when a producer grabs a random handful, the result yields and increase in public support. It is best summarized as follows,

> Commanders, embeds, and bureau chiefs/NMRs [news media
> representatives] did not think embeds lost their objectivity or were
> co-opted. The bond of friendship and trust that developed between a
> commander and an embed was a positive benefit because it
> improved the quality of the reports. Embeds reported both good and
> bad, but, when they reported on unfavorable incidents, they
> understood the background and context of what happened.[16]

Troop morale

After a brief "feeling out" period, the commanders realized the media were very professional and responsible, followed the ground rules, and provided accurate reports as they occurred. Likewise, the media developed a trust in the commanders who provided freedom and access to report objectively.[17] Some long-lasting friendships developed as well. There are numerous stories of embedded media who were reporting on "my Marines" or "my Soldiers." Ultimately many of the stories filed and aired back in the states portrayed the true professionalism of today's troops.

When the embeds were not transmitting news stories, they were often allowing troops to use either their satellite phones or laptops to communicate with loved ones back in the States. Family members often commented they had seen their service member on the news and they were proud of them. Many service members enjoyed having their picture taken or giving interviews because they were very proud of their unit and wanted America to know what they were doing.[18] Nothing improves troop morale like the ability to hear a loved one's voice when one is far away from home.

> It was a win for the military because it was the first time since the Vietnam War that the American people saw what individuals do in combat. It was a win for the media because it was the first time since Vietnam that they had such access across the board to combat operations and had the technology to communicate to the public in real time. It was a win for the public and military families because they could watch TV or read a newspaper or magazine and follow units in combat or see their loved ones.[19]

Information Operations

One of the objectives of the operational commander's effective use of IO is to counter third-party disinformation. Lessons learned in OEF illustrated a need to

counter disinformation. There is no better way to exploit disinformation than from multiple objective sources, such as embeds. The best example is the Iraqi Information Minister Mohammad Saeed al-Sahaf (aka Baghdad Bob), who swore the Americans were nowhere near Baghdad when, in fact, the embeds were reporting from Baghdad. Another embed recounts,

> The day after we captured the airport, I was listening to BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] on the radio as we were eating lunch, and there's Baghdad Bob on BBC saying 'there are no soldiers at the airport, we'll show you, we'll take you out there.' So I got on the phone and called my editor and filed a report, 'We're hearing this, and as I speak, I can see U.S. tanks and troops at the airport.[20]

Clearly, the embedded media's dedication to accurate reporting, although not intentional, assisted the operational commander with the serendipitous influence on information operations.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The embedded media program during OIF was a force divider for the tactical commander but, overall, a force multiplier for the operational commander. The benefits of having embeds certainly outweighed the costs. Therefore, the continuous nurturing and feeding of the embed program should continue. It is important to emphasize that OIF provided the perfect stage to rejuvenate the embedded media program. All the conditions were right to host such a large number of media personnel. As a result, one should not overly-simplify the message and think that the next conflict will be just as convenient to embed 700 media. There are a multitude of "what ifs" that could have derailed the embed program. What if the U.S. military

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suffered WWI, WWII or Vietnam type casualties? What if Weapons of Mass

Destruction (WMD) were used and the U.S. military lost thousands of troops in a

day? What if the military was not able to provide relative safety to the embeds and

the Iraqis targeted the media?   Regardless of the tragedies that occur on the

battlefield, the media will cover the news and report it back to the public. Therefore,

it is in the interest of the military to take advantage of the successful lessons learned

in OIF with respect to the embed program and create a "boiler plate" plan to preserve

the corporate knowledge regarding successful orchestration of an embed program

before time withers it away. Although the next conflict may be nothing like OIF,

there certainly will be multiple aspects that need to be replicated.

To start with, OASD-PA should host an "embedded media planning team"

conference and invite news media representatives and selected military personnel.

Their agenda would be to study the lessons learned through the embedded program

and develop alternatives to capture the advantages and address disadvantages of the

existing program. The desired end of this dialogue should be in the form of lessons

that can be incorporated into OPLAN PA annexes to be updated whenever the next

conflict erupts. While, it will be impossible to anticipate every possible contingency,

each Service has provided lessons learned and recommendations. If the

recommendations are not thoroughly vetted and acted upon, the lessons learned from

the next conflict may be identical.

One of the common complaints received from the embeds dealt with embedding

the media earlier in the conflict to get a familiarization with the unit. A possible

solution to this is to extend the qualification process for the embed program. The

military could begin offering the "media boot camp" course several times a year and

increase or decrease offerings. Upon graduation, a media member would be awarded

a level of qualification. The benefits would strengthen the military-media

relationship as well as provide media members with a better understanding of the

military structure.

The media has a definite impact on tactical and operational commanders. Instead

of relying on the well-polished public affairs department who is trained to handle

cameras, the press, and loaded questions, it may be beneficial to introduce military

leaders to media organization and operations in a controlled environment, such as at

the service colleges. Perhaps, the service colleges should integrate into the

curriculum the topic of military media relations and their impact on commanders. If

desired at the lower levels, the topic could be integrated into general military training

as an annual requirement for all service members, if deemed appropriate.

Regardless of the course of action taken to improve military-media relations, OIF

was an excellent demonstration of a successful embed program. It is imperative that

the military take advantage of the momentum established and advance the embedded

program even further. The embedded media truly is a force multiplier, and just as the

military continues to refine its effective weapons, so too must resources be allocated

toward further refinement of the embedded media program.

Notes

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